

THE OLYMPIC CITY

THE BOOST PROVIDED BY THE OLYMPIC GAMES WILL CAUSE PROFOUND AND IMPORTANT CHANGES IN BARCELONA IN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME. BUT THE BARCELONA GAMES WILL NOT BE REMEMBERED FOR THE SIZE OF THE CITY'S STADIUMS SO MUCH AS FOR THE EMPHASIS THAT WILL HAVE BEEN PUT ON THE QUALITY OF THE SITES.

LLUÍS MILLET ARCHITECT



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When something with such enormous implications for the economy and the surroundings as the Olympic Games lasts such a short time, it is hardly surprising that the organizational and town-planning aspects should go beyond the event itself and take into consideration the future development of the city.

From the early days of the candidature, in 1982, the thinking behind the location of the Olympic installations and behind all the proposed public works has tended to see the Olympic Games as a powerful boost for development and as an occasion for a significant transformation of Barcelona.

Barcelona is an unfinished city, with many projects which have been started and never completed, with shortcomings and deficiencies caused by inconsistencies arising from, amongst other things, the excessive growth rate during the sixties and a chronic shortage of public investment. In spite of the development work of 1929, Montjuïc, Barcelona's central park, has 150 hectares of unoccupied land to be landscaped. We now have four years to complete the ringroads and other main arteries which should have been built over the last twenty years. The reformation of

the stadium is more than thirty years overdue.

Some projects, such as the redevelopment of the sea-front, have been on the books practically since the time of the Cerdà Plan itself.

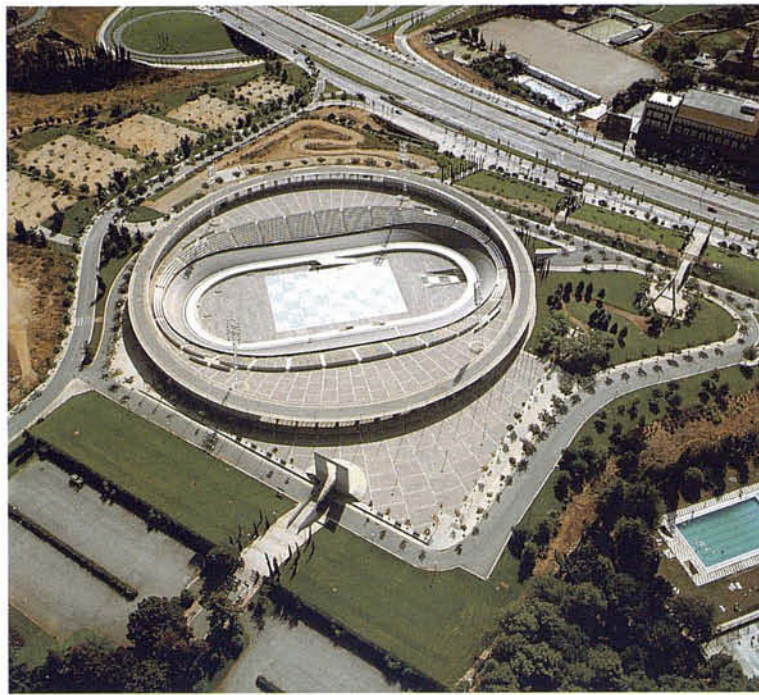
Barcelona's "Olympic Transformation", which got under way even before the city was nominated as seat of the 1992 Games, cannot be understood without first considering the patient, continued work in development and architecture, which was started by the first democratic city council, and which sooner or later, and with a greater or lesser financial effort, will lead to the realization of a single goal: the transformation of Barcelona into an important international capital.

A Romantic Option

The impact on cities of construction work undertaken for the Olympic Games has varied widely, but on the whole it has been a boost to the city's growth, has helped plan expansion and has led to the development of outlying areas. In these cases, criteria of size, sometimes approaching giantism, have been the deciding factors behind the projects undertaken.

Barcelona has taken completely the opposite approach, and has based its criteria for the location of the Olympic installations on considerations of quality rather than size. The idea was to do the minimum necessary to make the Games a brilliant success, while at the same time ensuring the best possible results for the city. The renovation and rehabilitation of the city was to have absolute priority over expansion and the creation of new built-up areas. The nature and the extent of the transformations had to be in keeping with the scale of the existing city, its parks and monuments, and with its history and culture.

The Barcelona Games will not be remembered for the size of the city's stadiums so much as for the —romantic, perhaps— emphasis on the qualities of the sites; the location of the four Olympic parks which, on shore or hillside, surround the city at almost walking distance from the centre itself; the quality of these parks, which are given just as much importance as the sports installations, are set in representative, easily accessible points within the city and are already equipped with a wide range of leisure and cultural facilities; the intrinsic quality of the new buildings, which conform to the city's structure and



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come close to being monuments in themselves, with their new, urban styles that express and symbolize the aspirations of a community.

The Principal Transformations

The four Olympic areas form a particular pattern on the map of Barcelona: the line joining Montjuïc and Parc de Mar marks a new sea-front which extends as far as the Besòs; the two great parks of Diagonal and Vall d'Hebron are linked by what in the future will mark Barcelona's inland facade, set on the hills surrounding the city; between Montjuïc and Diagonal runs the almost completed western axis along the streets of Numància and Tarragona, and in the East, Carles I will join Vall d'Hebron and Parc de Mar. The whole of the city is affected by these projects and will benefit from them.

The significance of this pattern should not be underestimated, since it implies a profound, systematic transformation of the city, based on three main aspects.

First of all, the infrastructure: to be really competitive, Barcelona needs to complete and improve its basic infrastructure. As re-

gards the road network, communications between different parts of the city will be significantly improved with the completion of the ringroads and the design of "intelligent" traffic control systems; the sections of railway line inside the city will undergo important modifications, so as to remove the barrier which has always prevented access to the sea and complete the system of central stations via a two pole arrangement; no less important will be the improvement of the drainage system, so as to avoid, once and for all, the all too frequent flooding of certain areas closest to the sea, at the same time completing the network of treatment plants for the water that is poured into the sea; the city will receive a complex cable communications system, and finally, all the transport systems will be improved, from the enlargement and modernization of the airport, central to Barcelona's development, to the underground network, which will allow the access of large numbers of people from any point in Barcelona to the four "Olympic areas".

The second line of action deals with the provision of new facilities in the city, correcting the shortages which have built up over the years, with open spaces, and

sports, culture and leisure facilities. Over the next four years, Barcelona will get more than two hundred hectares of new parkland, as well as high quality sports installations which will be suitable for any top level sports event, and which at the same time will become fundamental elements in the development of the community's sport. In the same way, the cultural facilities—museums, concert halls, theatres—will be improved both in number and quality.

Finally, there is a determined move to renovate or reconvert industrial or residential areas which need sizable public investment to overcome their present degradation. Renovation work will also take place in central areas which, given a more versatile structure, will bring new life to the commercial and service fabric, at the same time as they add to the range and variety of the leisure offer.

The boost provided by the Olympic Games, then, will cause profound and important changes in Barcelona in a short space of time. There has certainly never been a time in the city's past when so much work has been done in so few years. Barcelona will now occupy the place it deserves amongst the ranks of the leading international cities of the world. ●